



# Nightmare Cemetery

A Hallowe'en Frolic

by

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Providence 1964

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Siste Viator!

*All the characters in this book  
are entirely imaginary  
including the Author*

## Prelude

Dusk . . .

dusk deepening . . .

From the church-yard sod

rises a wreath of bats;

there is no sound but their soft

chittering as they sweep the ground

'twixt the last asters and dead goldenrod.

Like foul mosquitoes, hungrily they scud  
searching the turf, head-stones, till they have found  
the open oblong with the expectant mound.

At last here is their feast of dead blood.

Beneath a willow stands a youth alone,  
cloaked and with harp half-strung. The saturnine  
pale light seeps from a late and ovate moon  
rising behind him; by its glimmering light  
he stares into the pit, sees there his own  
dead face,

which also happens to be mine.

*Snap!* Now the eye-trick changes: the moonlight  
swells instantly to the glow of my desk-lamp.

Furnace warmth has replaced autumn damp.  
It is not dusk but well after midnight.  
The unnameable grave twitches from black to white,  
this oblong paper, whereto the bat-thoughts ramp,  
a challenge to my ancient writer's-cramp  
till I, the aged youth, am stung to write.

O pen, thaumaturge wand, what visions rise!  
Shall we explore? Dare you follow the leader?  
Our game may lead to deeps below all morning.  
Do you expect to look straight through my eyes  
even into my bowels? I give fair warning:  
there you may see your own pale face, dear reader.





Now I stumble to a pause.

Three forced syllables, flat, hollow, terse,  
and unevocative; for nothing stirs  
behind futurity's voluminous gauze.

Well, write them down. You shall be; and I was.

I cannot paraphrase you better or worse,  
you, non-existent purpose of my verse,  
- non-existent, and yet its Final Cause.

The Deep in me cries to the Deep in you,  
transfiguring the incomprehensible.

Angels carol new tunes above the hoarse  
demoniac basso-ostinato yell;

in all their counterpoint, one weak fact is true:  
you can hear my words; I do not hear yours.

This vacant page! - a window creamed with ice  
on which a child, across frost-fern and tree  
crystallized there, scratches bunglingly  
the letters of his name, through which he tries  
to scan the emptiness of sable skies  
and snow-locked, aching earth. And I am he  
scrawling on this cold page, in hopes to see  
through, into the future - of *your* eyes.

Yours, reader, yours; yours! yours! Do I succeed  
in piercing to your gaze? And can I burst  
into your brain? Can you see my eyes, too,  
following, trying to catch yours, as they read  
the clumsy letters of my name reversed?  
Can you not sense them stiffly staring through?



All I have written is my epitaph -  
dim phrases failing utterly to define  
that inmost thing I'd like to think divine,  
but inexpressible by groan or laugh.  
Though I have tried, I have not written half  
even of the facts that fitted my design  
of words; nothing in all my books is mine;  
nothing authentic but the autograph.

I tried to write my name: that much seemed needed.  
And I have failed if it has found a place  
only beneath the title. But I succeeded  
if in this verbal wilderness and valley  
sometimes you hear a voice you cannot place  
that speaks your own name softly, authentically.

## In Every Poem

In every poem, something is sure to die;  
something sinks helplessly back into the abyss;  
plucked away from the momentary kiss,  
its message stifled to a muted cry.

And so with life: no matter how we try  
to say what living means, where we found bliss,  
we sink in hideous metamorphosis,  
our half-delivered message blurred to Why.

Still, after-images blend in a gleam  
that glows awhile, however fugitive.

I have wakened, yet so it is with me:  
although my presence has gone past memory,  
now, while your eyes rest on this page, I live,  
an accidental figment of your dream.

Why should I bother to write? Why should you cast  
a single glance upon these fading pages?

The answers, I suppose, involve two ages:

I look to the future; you to the past.

Yet it is true I write about the present,  
and you shall find your own times pictured here.

Reality never changes, for I fear  
both waterfall and rainbow are incessant.

But Time itself is a strange paradox  
bounded and yet unbounded: all the clocks  
tell the same hour, ignoring centuries.

Wherefore all my writing probably is  
(unknowing to myself) some deep, vague plea  
for just this temporal immortality.

## Some Come Here to Sit and Think

Yet *you* MY immortality? Poo-poo!

*Your* feeble memory a sepulchre

where, at your pleasure, you can disinter

ME? Oh! what an ideal, to pursue

a struldbrug immortality in *you*!

Are you, or not, an adequate avatar?

Of course, you preen yourself and think you are,

then reconsider modestly. Hoo! hoo!

No: for such survival I should worry!

Hail and farewell! Gesundheit! Skoal! Prosit!

Here I go, leaving behind just guck and gurry.

I pull the chain (all deaths are suicide);

commit my last nuisance; with a wise-crack, glide

down the gulp of the cosmic water-closet.

Strip off the clothes -

the flesh -

the skeleton:

nothing remains.

But force the small door set  
neat in the brow, the bosom, loins, or feet  
(the bosom-door be it!); then look:

another one,

another . . .

Welling blackness, welling cold,  
a needle-shot, minnying ether rather than air.  
- Is this all that the beating breast may hold?

No:

small and hard as a marble, a moon  
leaps up into the blank bosom,  
shedding a sleet  
of coarse wild light on cloudy rocks,  
to set

abruptly, behind a silhouette of dune.

But the last door? Has anyone reached there?

Did he open? What did he find?

No one has told.

Perhaps he saw, froze dumb in full despair.



Black the Moon rose, and she descended black,  
invisible in the dazzle of western light.  
An angel hypnotized by the excessive bright,  
lost in adoration, she turned her back  
(pure shadow) on us, while her predestined track  
high she rode towards the sun in wild delight,  
blazing with beauty. But to my dull sight  
black the moon rose, and she descended black.

And my own globe of blackness? Can it be  
that though this side is darkness visible,  
unchanged in perigee or apogee,  
the other side flames wild with ecstasy,  
dazzled with God, oblivious to this hell?  
Is there this side, which I can never see?

"With how sad steps -

O Moon - ?" - and lo! the moon replied to me.

"I draw the adoring oceans to their flood;

"I wring from girls the tribute of their blood;

"I stimulate love, poetry, lunacy.

"I set the dogs to howling - also thee;

"I lift the soul asleep beneath its load

"till its feet wander in dream-antipode.

"But of all this, I am ignorant utterly:

"for I died in the very act of birth,

"the still-born, only child of thine own earth.

"I know nothing of madness, oceans, love.

"My voice thou hearest is thine, lost in the night,

"echoed from death; this magical moonlight

"a mere reflection of some fire far-off."

O yearning moon, never to reach your sun!  
He fills you with his light, but knows you not.  
O yearning ocean, never to reach your moon!  
who fills you with light, giving she cares not what.

And though my rayless mood were the reverse  
side of occult, absolute ecstasy,  
the heartless pleasure of life remains my curse,  
torches torturing as sun - moon, moon - sea.

Yet no: the moon circles me; and I in turn  
circle the distant sun: and we all burn,  
shedding our sticky ash in filaments  
which weave their spiderwebs of influence  
round and round about through the silent air,  
binding our victims with our own despair.

## Miss Jephthah

*It Shouldn't Be Let Happen To Such A Nice Girl*

Fled from the intolerableness of pity  
into the core of the incandescent city,

she hides in one small room of a hotel,  
her angry brain sealed in its ivory cell,  
her heart dark in its crimson cave as well,

For the dread Crab has found her for his food.  
Swimming the warm, slow rivers of her blood,  
all the sweet reaches of her maidenhood  
he ranges, settling on the bosom's bud.

Dumb-lipped, through her closed window high above  
the singing streets, she hears the theme-song of  
radios pretending everyone can love.

Up and down the elevators goes she,  
wailing the waste of her virginity.

When?

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*Memorial blank*

When did you die? No one recalls that day.  
It is a blank page in my diary,  
and blank, mercifully blank, in my memory.  
All I remember is this: the sun shone grey.  
Oh, the dim lilacs! flower of death in May,  
of young death, cleanly bath of purity,  
haunting, taunting, always reminding me,  
reminding me, always pointing the way.

Not in the earth, but deep within my heart  
were you interred, with spiritual spade;  
and now, darling, you are forever part  
of me, beneath the tremulous lilac-shade.

Yet - yet - now I sense a weird, profound misgiving  
that it was I who died. . . You are still living?

Ah, once beloved! - half-loved for half a day -  
you have preceded me into the ground,  
yet putting up, above your modest mound,  
a small white stone out of the grassless clay,  
like an initialed handkerchief, to say  
(if anybody anywhere is found  
asking your whereabouts in the profound)  
that you, ahead of us, passed through this way.

Evasive beloved! Even as the kiss  
I dreamed of planting on your breast in joke  
blazes, a star floating beyond all strife,  
so you still live somewhere in the abyss.

Abruptly, remembering you were dead, I woke.  
Could waking be our death? and death, real life?



*- clutching me by the throat, interrupts the anecdote.*

Hah! insolent He breaks out his fever-flag  
in these thin cheeks, signaling my collapse,  
while captured squads of life-blood with hoarse brag  
are tumbled over the ramparts of my lips.

Too late we learned how the fifth column crept  
into my citadel, even to the seat of breath,  
and organized their cells, until they leapt -  
already victorious - to the standard of Death.

Well, at least soon there'll be the end of fleeing  
from the just punishment for that original sin  
unguessed, never committed. (But did I? - I?)

And when I sink into the heart of Being,  
stripped of consciousness shall I stand within,  
stark naked under a furious lidless Eye?

## Strike Up the Band!

*(Swing low)*

And now majestically the end of Time  
approaches me! Staring, I watch expand  
a blank oblong, no bigger than a hand  
but spreading as it nears me unsublime.  
I stare: the grave-shaped Shadow shadowless  
looms in a squall-blast, blackening the skies,  
blowing off my last hair, my teeth, ears, eyes  
away into meaningless nothingness;  
then, like a box-trap, falls.

Of course, above it

I see the descending angel-squadron, dressed  
in azure prettily trimmed with rose and white,  
playing wall-eyed on their preraphaelite  
instruments "Hearts & Flowers", which I detest;  
but I will smile and swear to them I love it.

What was I? That I cannot say; and you  
can hardly guess, because I could not say.  
Call me a sleeper who took night for day,  
and who imagined that his dreams were true.  
Some were lost chaoses without a clue,  
some trivial, some terrible, some gay;  
some were mere memories of yesterday,  
but some were beauty organized anew.

These came nearest the dawn; symbols ascending  
flowered, while the unguessed sky became a prism  
above a sun rising inexorably.

And I, feeling Reality impending,  
sobbed in self-pitying sentimentalism  
- sobbed *to the dream!* - "I die; remember me."

When in my solar plexus, the world sags, a lead ball,  
and my tired knees feel too weak to lug me up the stairs,  
and every face I meet is a hostile stone wall  
mortared solid with ooze of terrors and despairs;  
when I recall no smile unrooted in dry tears  
(since every tenderness springs from a deeper hurt);  
when searching my whole life back through diminishing years,  
the only milestones are the friends who did me dirt;  
then, when Time stops between yesterday and tomorrow  
and favorite books are weary series of blank pages,  
and on my soul rolls, like low thunder, all the sorrow  
and fear which is Mankind through ages upon ages, -  
O then, what thought shall make my heart at heaven's gate sing?  
I do not know although I have read of such a thing.

Life is the big neighborhood party, me lad,  
to which you weren't invited. And so what.  
Don't brood they meant to leave you out - that's bad;  
try to pretend somehow you were forgot.  
Don't happen past, and hope to be asked in:  
you'd only smirk and stammer like a fool.  
No! Make them sorry! Fill them with chagrin! -  
- Swipe all the beer left on the porch to cool!

But that would show you care.

No, take a chance -

walk in as though you owned the place - be brash  
and grab the prettiest girl and make her dance.

(This is one party that you cannot crash.)  
- So, go home; climb into bed and try to sleep.  
(The cold, deep bed and your long, long last sleep.)

*"To thine own self be true. . ."*

O ghastly parody

Of my dark soul, O body (brother Cain) !

Which is mine own self?

And in Christian charity

Tell me, what is the truth, O Pilate brain?

What is my self but a God-cheated Ahab,

A proud mad cripple everybody loathes;

And the soiled loins, prededicate to Rahab,

Shrink, cinctured in self-polluted clothes.

The horizon closes in, thorned and shrivelling!

The snake-spear rears, biting the heart's blood!

The nails! -

And so I find myself stand snivelling

Where once that saint, heroic Jesus, stood.

(My audience, the angels, bored blasé

And tired of laughing, have all slipped away.)



O Tears Wrung from Seraphic Fire,  
is my Life a Perfect Work of Art?

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Creator of my dreams, therefore of me,  
who knows me, and who never can be known,  
lolling on an inviolable throne  
deep below woe, in pure serenity,  
do you indeed laugh with daemonic glee  
at all my wanderings, blunderings alone?  
How in eternity do you atone  
for the disasters of my tragedy?

Tragedy? Comedy? Tragedy of Errors!  
which you, the author, watch, amused yet tense  
over your complications of my farces.  
Do you contrive this plot of tears and terrors  
to edify an angelic audience  
with some profound and exquisite catharsis?

## Mysterious Arena

*Here I come, whether ready or not*

Dazzled after the blackness of my cell  
wherein so long I secretly was jailed,  
now in the loud arena I see too well  
the grinning teeth of the Emperor unveiled.

Vast audience, tiered by centuries, year on year!  
late I sat with you, bored, amused, then thrilled.  
Still you sit there at ease, while I face here  
the time when I am slowly, horribly, killed.

I pity you all, so gaily plumed and gemmed:  
you too shall wake one midnight, gagged and gyved,  
rushed to the unjust tribunal, be condemned  
to some foul death the Emperor has contrived.

Ave! Salve! Vale! Now nears my hour,  
Mortido, when I pass beyond your power.

No, no - we like good music now and then;  
but classics all day long, always repeating  
without a break, is something else again!  
And then your system of excess of bright  
must ruin even the cherubs' eyes - so glarey!  
How can you sleep? - make love - if there's no night?  
Infinity sounds dreadfully cold and dreary:  
*we* have refrigerating and central heating.

Your heaven, I fear, would bore us past all yawning,  
(*Willie! behave yourself! Bury that talent!*)  
while here all of us men are strong and rich, -  
(*What's that?*) - and all the girls are gay and gallant.  
Ah, you must go? Yes, it is near to dawning.  
Close the gate tight.

(*Halloo! a witch! Witch! WITCH!*)

We are the freaks, the silent shrieks, all wrecked  
in our conceiving or upbreeding; we  
are hunchback minds, halt bodies, all elect  
to failure and contemptibility.

Forego your jeering; let us make the joke;  
be we your clowns with bladder, blunder, shove.

- Hark! that was our tongue-cut seer who spoke.  
And he whose heart was ripped out preaches love:  
Why all the selfishness? Why all the hate?

We cripples know exactly what's to lose:  
our maims are visions. Yet we unaidables  
see those whom we would die to help, refuse  
all aid whatever, till it is too late.

They drop, drop, drop, into their separate hells.

No: let go, parents; let go with your heart;  
relax its clutch, lest your own heart be riven  
with that crazed breakage which, for all its smart,  
never opens a gateway into heaven.

Let the boy go. The path which you have trod  
he will not tread; nor shall his own path straighten.  
Cease to assume that you should be his god:  
when you did so, you merely made a satan.

The death-wish has him; he adores the devil  
of your creation - challenges damnation.  
Your final good is evermore his evil;  
therefore your evil might be his salvation.

May he plod the whole path predestined his  
into a Happiness which (though not yours) is.

Head-foremost toward the imminent accident, ghost  
after ghost swoops, twisting helpless wild  
hands, shrieking in a ring: "Look! The child!  
The match! Stop it! *Fire!*"

So the most;  
but some few wiser spirits sit, knees crossed  
in spectral armchairs, now quite reconciled  
to these brief tragedies, - instead, beguiled  
with the neat plotting of the holocaust.

O reader (*ghost to me*), which do you do?  
Read the portents invisible to my dark,  
shouting unheard, while the accidental spark  
smoulders, until the hidden brain white-hot  
bursts into flame of act? -

Or do you not,  
but sit, reading comfortably?

(Look! Ghosts ring *you* - !)



HEADLINES!!! - The stomach surges in disgust.

SUBHEADS! - why, it's a national disgrace!

*The Article!* - my eyes devour; - and must

I tolerate, then pity, then - ? - NO, NO, NO!

A murderer lurks in me; therefore I revel

vicariously in the raping and the pain:

I am both victim and blood-lapping devil,

such ways I keep and pass and turn again.

Let not that guilt, wherein soul-sunk I read,

obsess me till I am identified

with him in mutual Satanic vanity,

lest also I permit one little deed,

then offer *myself* to be crucified

to expiate the guilt of all humanity.

Now every morning, on an inside page,  
is a fresh lot of war-dead photographs,  
with brief biographies, brief epitaphs.  
Scarcely one lad is yet of legal age.

Not the whole body: just the unsmiling head.  
I look at you, and you stare back at me.  
In my eyes is the last of life you'll see.  
Is it worth it? - How dead-pan are the dead!

Too much of this will put me out of sorts;  
therefore I shrug it off with "This is war",  
and I shall have forgotten you before  
I turn the page, to comic-strips and sports.

There is no help for it, this side the moon.  
So, so long fellows! I'll be seeing you soon.

Now, grappling on the greased chute to the tomb,  
compelled, man grasps for better or for worse  
the ultimate power of the universe,  
hoping to cheat somehow the general doom.

Now the end of the endless warfare from  
Adam, with his innate, mysterious curse,  
speeds all his offspring to the sudden hearse  
of earth itself. A planet murdered! Boom!

Blame not the tool. The real bomb is that  
bone-bubble blown upon the human spine  
by Nature some half-million years ago,  
- the Skull and its dread contents. Scat, man, scat!  
Your experiment fails, ended by sunshine.  
Down to the gentler brontosaurus below!

*Marche funebre, lento*

Put on your solemnest clothes, your solemnest  
face: hire brass and blare out Chopin; we  
trudge graveward to the tune; the decent knee  
touches the mud (dust unto dust).

*The best*  
*of men is dead!*

Proclaim throughout the rest  
of the wide world we praise impartially  
the genius that he was (or thought to be).

Surely we pass with honors the Christian test.

For he is dead (harmless). Let us admit  
frankly we wronged him - now that we are able  
to feast upon that spiritual fare of his,  
that wisdom we insisted was false wit.  
We all forgive him: harmless, calculable,  
now he is dead.

(Are you so sure he is?)

Yes, we p-----d in his face - was not that human?  
(We wash it clean with this official tear.)  
We lost his job - he skidded in our smear.  
We burned his book (I still think it quite common).  
(*Did he leave manuscripts?*) - And then, that woman!  
But count the flowers heaped upon his bier -  
the cost would have paid his grocer one full year!  
Really more expiation is due no man.

*Coda: "'Twere to consider too curiously''.*

Now he is safe (and we are safe), for now  
he is made one with Nature -

for see there:

up he sprouts, in a Resurrection lily  
reincarnated!

- Whoa! head off that cow!

- Too late: she cropped him.

Pantheism, where -

whither - our hero now?

It is all too silly.

## No Buddy Knows de Trubble

(*It is inadvisable to go to your own funeral.*)

*He was the very king of kindly wit,  
and so we thought him happiest. What surprise  
when death revealed . . . Yet (now we think of it)  
wherever else were seen such tragic eyes?  
We never even guessed his tragedy:  
No! nor his guts in willing not to die!  
But well he knew his generosity  
would be appreciated by and by.*

THAT'S WHAT THEY'LL THINK OF ME.

But when he read  
in his friends' hearts, he saw only too well  
nowhere a clear, whole-hearted approbation,  
But friendship tempered with cool reservation,  
indifference with a muddled toleration,  
amusement founded on shrewd estimation,  
jealousy fertile with false accusation,  
selfishness with its murderous calculation . . .

OH, cried the ghost, I WISH THAT I WERE DEAD!  
BUT OH! ALAS! one cannot die in hell.

He rushed to greet me when he heard my key,  
and danced his adoration such a way  
that my heart, ash-choked by the smouldering day,  
leapt into flame of quiet clarity.

Perfect in faith and hope and charity,  
he never guessed the ghosts he drove away,  
no, nor the furies with their lash and bray:  
he knew only the very best of me.

When in the final dusk I feel his nose  
insinuated under my dying hand,  
I shall know that I near the borderland  
which his love threaded through the darkening snows.  
And when we reach that gate of pearl and rose,  
sole witness to my character might he be!





Books unto Book

*A little Usnea*

*is good for whatever ails you.*



*Here I am again!*

Starvation kills slowly and unespied.  
So it killed him, because he was too proud  
(or cowardly?) to steal, or beg aloud;  
and secretly he expired. (Suicide?)

At his dim funeral, he is personified  
by me, hired to mime before the crowd  
him-in-the-box. I do it without shroud  
to fool all those who never heard he died.

And yet - suppose - Did I hear something stir  
inside the coffin descending into the grave?  
Shall I shout "Stop the burial!" and save...?

Impossible to save. Far happier  
to let the coffin sink, and let the knave  
stifle to death. And never disinter.

Come with me! Look!

Look down - but hold your breath.

In the abyss - there: see! -

What is that flying?

those forms of fog writhing and liquifying -

Why, they are men struggling, drowning in death!

What stench, treacheries! what crucifying!

diseases, madresses, exposed entrails,

malformations, throats cut on broken grails -

all the dirt and indignities of dying.

"Listen!" desperately each voice calls and wails;

"For you! - no matter how this body drowns -

"I learned The Secret! . . ." There the voices stop.

At our feet drop dead clots of books, slap, slap,

replacing voices; over them pours in veils

pall upon pall of academic gowns.

Some dead remain, fouled statues on their tomb,  
some vanish to a voice in the night air,  
some burst to flame, an all-consuming glare,  
some melt to water of a fecund womb,  
but all the rest accept the common doom,  
resolve to earth; even the coffin's care  
(that last defence of pride) rots in despair  
and sheds their uselessness beneath the loam;

whilst I, on tattered paper wings, would soar  
with valiant labored flappings toward the sky -  
prevent me, heaven! lest some unpinioned bore  
clutch inescapably my trailing toe  
in hopes that he immortally may fly,  
emitting footnotes on the crowd below.

*Necromancy in the Necropolis*

This is the cemetery of old souls,  
humanity's paper memory of desire,  
of hope and fear, greed, bigotry, love and ire,  
encysted in their numbered pigeon-holes.  
Our Great with academic aureoles  
are dead - hence harmless: now we may admire  
the lava of their once Vesuvian fire.  
(Careful! lest ashes hide some undead coals.)

Coffined in leather, bound in linen sheets,  
the form preserved with all the printer's art,  
behold the emptied brain, the chalky heart,  
the mummied loins, now unsarcophagussed.  
Toy as you like with Shakespeare, Melville, Keats!  
Open the bookcase doors, and -

Fie! what dust!

I AM, I want, I will possess mine own.  
My diamond crown fills everything with light.  
(He sets His sheepish Son upon the throne?  
It shall be mine.) - Ah! the excessive bright!  
(Seal tight the inner door.) I will; I can,  
though He oppose me in conceited spite,  
being admittedly jealous. He makes a man,  
I spoil it with a worm-plugged apple-core;  
and so the Son falls out of the frying pan  
into my fire. (Seal tight the outer door.)  
I snicker at the silly hypocrite,  
snug at my realm they all are greedy for,  
as this is heaven, nor am I out of it.

O Mother Muse, whose silver throat and breast  
were once my song, my food, my sky, my rest,

Whose supple hand guided my boy-man's fire  
upon the cords of the paternal lyre,

Yours the pure melody and mine the words  
saved the wild heroes from the Siren birds,

Yours the inaudible, evil spell that bred  
the secret serpent of my marriage bed,

But mine the song that broke the infernal bars  
and found my bride midst gulfs of dripping stars,

Then could not hold her. All Hell shuddered. Whose  
victorious voice shrieked "Kill him!", Mother Muse?

And flung my head, still singing in my dream,  
down the red eddies of the Thracian stream.



I am the dawning star, who from the deep  
lifts' the bright dream from out the gate of horn;  
I too the evening star - all travel-worn  
thought I lead to the ivory fold of sleep.  
Magnet of love-in-idleness, I keep  
the moth-lamp marking the mist-hidden bourn  
where springs the eglantine without a thorn.  
Come to the smiling eyes that never weep.

As the dim veils of consciousness divide,  
look! - you may look fully - and see again  
the face, the unsagging breasts, the gliding side,  
the dimpled depilated abdomen  
without the fissure.

What am I? Maybe  
your friend - maybe the secret enemy.

## Pyramus to Thisbe

Hist! Reader-Thisbe! Listen to my low call,  
your Pyramus whispering through this paper wall.

The parents sleep: slip out into the gloom,  
down to our trysting-place at Ninus' tomb.  
There love awaits you – love! I bid you come!

(Yes: it is I the corpse whom you hear sing,  
serenading you, Life, on your heart-string:  
**Death is ever amorous hungering**  
for life: death has nought – life has everything.)

Down to the tomb, O Thisbe, my adored!  
Here at the tomb awaits your love, your lord.  
Here I await you (lioness . . . corpse . . . sword).

Come, Thisbe, come! (And you are coming – yea,  
since your begetting have been on your way.)

*You talk as though the dead desire to wive,  
but there I think do none embrace. - Ah, no?  
Surely the dead are dead!* Do you think so?  
Listen: your "dead" are all buried alive!  
Stifled, strangling, they vanish, but contrive  
(shroud-bound, strait-coffined, buried deep, sod-sealed,  
then weighted down with slate-stone) unrevealed  
to wait their hour, knowing that they survive.

When the bell strikes, they have their quaint amours  
which (being fleshless) are insatiate.  
The midnight resurrections run their course  
of country-dances till the last star beams.  
The furies of those fleshless loves are great.  
*When do they rise?* Every night, in your dreams.

I have outlived the moon, for I have paced,  
delighted in its dazzle, all its phases;  
deliberate in deliciousness have traced  
each shining house's labyrinthine mazes.  
Deep-set within the shifting diamond hazes  
in every cusp I found a deity's shrine,  
but after offering incense, singing praises,  
I learned at last no deity is divine.  
So now, clear-eyed for all the lunar wine,  
completely gratified I reach the end;  
those who have really lived hail Proserpine,  
the only true and everlasting friend.  
Dark o' the moon, the perfect burial plot,  
marked in the almanac by a black dot.

Yea, once I also twanged at my small lyre,  
yodelling in the universal hosanna,  
but soon got bored shouting "Great is Diana!"  
and so I cleaned the whole thing up with fire.  
Oh, my great climbing flames, that raised me higher  
than priests, than gods, with all their silly story!  
making their vanity a funeral pyre  
which was the altar of my greater glory.

I AM

the unpredictable, inexplicable foe,  
spark from the dark, belly-laugh of Below;  
I am the smirk when everything tumbles down,  
puck of the perverse, skids under civilization,  
the discreating curse of all creation;  
I am your shadow, and I wear a crown.

Beneath the frigid and innumerable haze  
of Fixed Stars driven by a dark power behind  
stands the Saturn-skull of humankind,  
celestial sphere and sealed hermetic vase.  
Within it, globes conglobed swirl, phase on phase  
rotating in a geometric grind.  
The innermost is Earth, our conscious mind,  
impaled by all the planetary rays.

Oh, whirlpool snarl of influences! – Saturn,  
Jupiter, Mars, Sol, Venus, Mercury, Luna  
shed virtues now beneficent, now malign;  
but at the center of the gordian pattern  
revolve within Earth's core (Fata-Fortuna)  
two lightless, unguessed planets: Dis and Proserpine.

*Pandare*

In love's ballet I hopped always behind:  
no girl ever seemed worthy of the pain;  
yet urging love to others was but kind.  
(The fox and goat conspired in my brain.)  
And that black night of planetary rain,  
which loved I more: young Troilus or my niece,  
when I manoeuvred them into full bliss?

Now my proud name is made a common noun  
because I brought those youngsters breast to breast.  
Do I deserve that infamous renown?  
(By what invisible lust was I possessed?  
Can one be damned for sins one never guessed?  
Oh tell me, all futurity, is there no  
mercy for those who know not what they do?)

Alas for me? Speared to my death between  
benefic Venus and malefic Mars,  
I rose through sphere in sphere, until serene  
I reached the final crystal of Fixed Stars,  
whence now, above the planetary wars  
I saw below, pierced by Achilles' shaft,  
my ruined corpse; and seeing it, I laughed -

at what? Why, I was finally above  
heroic slaughter on the field of war  
and the long routine of chivalric love  
(whore playing lady? lady playing whore?).  
Therefore I laughed in the celestial door,  
released from all unnatural ideal  
into the bliss of the completely real.



Abandoned in the planet-smitten city  
dominated by Helen, that mere whore,  
widowed I dwelt alone, with none to pity;  
then, while Troy-walls eroded in the war,  
fidelity to one at last I swore,  
but after his year's patient, arduous wooing,  
slid to another in two months' pursuing.

Traitor loneliness! Dreadful joys that speed  
so fast away! To the sole nightingale  
what mattered it if Troilus, Diomedes,  
or yet another echoed his sweet wail?  
Tragedy is the spring of each love-tale,  
also its termination; and I hear  
dead laughter filling every heavenly sphere.

Two women, chained together, rise. The first:

"I am the Vortex downward, called the Flesh,  
"Vessel of Love, the Pit wherefrom the fount  
"Of Life jets upward, ever hot and fresh.  
"My sometime consorts have been past my count.  
"(Although my shriveling skin sags to the skull,  
"One kiss! - then am I not young? beautiful?)"

The second woman two small spaniels nursed:

"I am the Vortex upward, called the Soul,  
"Spire of Love, the Tip wherefrom the fount  
"Of Life floods downward, conquering the whole  
"Being to Spirit. (Ah! how, how to surmount  
"The murdered image of the baby Christ  
"Hymning Her to whom It was sacrificed?)"

Drunk on the wine of God that fatal day,  
against the Plague, devourer of all good,  
we swore a sacred oath of brotherhood  
to slay the Deathless, whom but Christ can slay.

Fatal presumption! Fatal arrogance!  
We to the real death, Damnation, sold  
our own immortal spirits for some gold,  
not recognizing Him through ignorance.

O glut for gold! Under the fatal tree  
we ate and drank damnation without care  
beside the brother we had murdered there.  
I am the Pardoner. Who shall pardon me?

Damned, compelled, I spread the Pestilence.  
Come, buy your Christ for thirty silver pence!

That was a pretty toy of Ptolemy's,  
the conglobed crystals rounding a pure chord  
to cradle man against catastrophes,  
all for the greater glory of the Lord.  
But in my brain I tried it, felt it yield,  
then burst, the simulacrum of a spell  
woven by wizards. Its vanishing revealed  
the endless chaos where we ever dwell.  
Nowhere may Archimedes fix his stand;  
no up or down for god or worshipper;  
nothing exists above us or below:  
no Primal Mover with gigantic hand  
to spin us; nowhere for falling Lucifer -  
nowhere for the ascending Christ - to go.

*Everybody loves a fat man*

The lad with bloated belly and lank purse  
wins no war-ransoms, makes no wealthy marriage.  
Forget that my obesity was a curse -  
laugh your own guts out at my portly carriage!

Hal, whom I grew to love (acting that part),  
never would see my desperate need of aid;  
therefore so easily he crushed my heart,  
breaking the promise never really made.

O God, God, God! I could a tale upchoke  
dirtier than tragic poet ever dreamt.  
But better to be an everlasting joke,  
making men laugh (thinking themselves the witty),  
than give up, yield, sink into self-contempt,  
bawling abroad for everybody's pity.

Actor to Actor: Alas, Poor Which?

*A pestilence on him for a mad rogue.*

This book in your hand is Yorick's actual skull,  
answering back through the thick graveyard fog.

- Hello, you Hamlet! Listen for once: don't hog  
the entire conversation! You're too full  
of that most musical, melancholy, beautiful  
interminable interior monologue.

A bad, bad habit! - dunks you in the bog  
of pure self-pity - and it gets SO DULL!

Now: you are deaf because you are never mute.

So, Life, shut up! and hearken to the Corse:  
it is high time you listen to another.

Music adores a vacuum; as lute to lute,  
so does my empty pate echo in yours.

- And smell so? Pah!

- Pee-you yourself, my brother.

Racked to death throughout life! And shall the earth  
belong alone to the meek, strong, and wise?  
To live, must we not grasp their good through lies  
and mask our indirections with our mirth?  
Admittedly we are of little worth,  
judged by the twelve commandments; but no eyes  
read our dark hearts. God dare not moralize  
on the defects he gave us at our birth.

Yet - my revenge, accomplished, turned to error  
and vanished, expiated. Life was purged  
by death; nothing at all remained thereof,  
except the internal truth, which now upsurged.  
Even my basic hate was burned by terror  
down to its real root, a hidden love.

Copernicus searched outward; whereas I  
searched inward, even to the primal Ire,  
and saw the smouldering roots of the Dark Fire  
and the Triangle with the lidless Eye.  
Here the astringent Pride contracts awry;  
from it outgrasps convulsive the Desire,  
the two tearing apart, until in gyre  
the Wheel of Anguish turns. I heard the Schrei . . .

The dark world is the Father's Wrath - is Hell.  
From this deep evil, everything has issue.  
This is the root of life; here Satan fell;  
here you shall fall, forevermore to dwell  
lost in the Wrath after you die, unless you -

[*What follows is wholly unintelligible.*]



Do you sleep yet, annihilated, waiting  
the miracle of the Millenium?

Your dream is ended, that the Son shall come  
splitting the spheres, Creation discreating.  
Helpless we sail an abyss, anticipating  
nothing whatever in our vacuum;  
our wisest men have vainly sought to plumb  
the void we drift in, endlessly oscillating.

Yet your lost lips still whisper "Liberty":  
and as the old abuses clutch more power,  
exalting mortal fear and living shame,  
there comes the sound of an awakening sea:  
your golden trumpets vomiting red flame  
summon Beauty and Truth to win the hour.

He tossed his only child out of the window,  
bludgeoned to death his wife when she protested,  
killed the policeman who then came to arrest him,  
killed judge, jury, and hangman in one bunch.  
Evading Death, he even slew the Devil,  
and with the corpse he choked and poisoned Hellmouth.  
Both human and divine Justice he thwarted, -  
and all the children applauded Mr. Punch.

I too am worked by interior alien fingers;  
but sensing the inextinguishable laughter  
of baby cherubim, chortling in a throng  
at the antics of Mr. Punch and Mrs. Judy  
and the delightfully perfect Triumph of Evil,  
can we say that the author wrote it wrong?

Who wakes me from the Real, where charioted  
upon a wild thrill of the nightingale  
sleeping we soar together in one veil,  
my Moon and I, at last forever wed?  
Who wakens me from that delicious bed,  
naming the name which lived without avail?  
What is the voice I hear, mortally pale,  
reminding me that somewhere I am dead?

My body was the urn, wherein my heart  
between the putrifying lungs was buoyed;  
my poetry was the painted scene outside.  
There is the hollow secret of my art,  
the mortuary Grecian Urn, now void.  
Maybe in some museum it has not died.

Death is the elder; Love, his sister-bride;  
he the male skeleton, she the magnetic womb;  
he the spadesman, she the creative loom;  
he fallen Adam, she sprung from his side.  
Standing upon a grave I prophesied  
that both perish together, but the tomb  
sank to a vortex . . .

O lost Ulalume,  
the buried dead have never wholly died!

For dread Astarte, star ungordianed  
from the loins, rises up through the leonine  
heart, kindling the already white-hot brain;

then from the sepulchre stretches a fleshless hand  
darkening upward into the sapphirine,  
and black phalanges pinch it out again.

Look! In the dim, grim library, with door  
and windows locked, pooled in the spreading stains  
of fascinating and repulsive gore  
lie the emphatic, enigmatic Remains.

On the cold hearth, stabbed through the heart aghast!  
Twelve suspects: which? We are horribly unsure,  
till one by one, eleven are stabbed. The last,  
trapped, confesses he was the murderer.

Yet was he? The detective, you recall,  
was close at hand when every corpse expired.  
But the author! He it was devised all blunders  
for You. O Dream-Devourer, they were all  
spun to glut what you have so deep-desired.

("MUSTN'T!" a bodiless roar bluntly thunders.)

O secret brother, are you not loin-sick?  
Satyr whom every real man would despise  
(did he suspect) and tear off your disguise,  
then turn you out with a contemptuous kick.  
The captain of your soul is lunatic;  
Yillah is lost, forgotten; Hautia's eyes  
are turned perversely down. When shall uprise,  
to smash your vessel, leper Moby Dick?

Ahab, Taji, Bartleby, Pierre,  
Benito, Clarel, Claggart, Ishmael -  
all symbolizing the unspeakable.  
Study these stripped case-histories from hell,  
and then, American mast-spine, no despair:  
sail on, dear brother! I have escaped to tell.

Maturity is managing a deadlock  
by which to check Fate till the final Rest.  
But children! - I had three sons born in wedlock,  
who were the very things I had suppressed:  
Dmitri, offspring of the furious cod;  
Ivan, the frigid offspring of the brain;  
Alyosha of the heart, fleeing toward God.

Which was the sin whose hatred struck me dead?

Dmitri, condemned, was innocent - also was  
the unnoted murderer of an innocent lad.

Ivan, horrified to find he was the cause,  
confessed; but everybody thought him mad.

Alyosha, at the innocent's grave, began  
to lead an unending cheer for triune Man.

The subtlest, bitterest foes are those who dwell  
in one's own house, we learned in babyhood.  
Woe and thrice woe to her who lives in Hell  
and does not cry: "Evil, be thou my good!"

So I, the older girl, renounced desire  
to match the others at their deviltry,  
tempering my woman's heart in their black fire  
till it was steel, to shield my Emily.

I beat them all! with dagger and disguise,  
with fraud and bickering and poison-tooth;  
thus I became Empress of Hate and Lies,  
and Emily, High-Priest of Love and Truth.

"Damned?" you say, "damned for the greater glory?"  
Why, you have not half-understood my story.



Three Views of Harriet Craig

75

(*For George Kelly*)

I

Out of what rancid hovel crept the witch?  
The demon summoned from what inner cleft?  
The incubus begotten in what ditch?

The hag at every portal weaves her weft,  
fetid webs over eye and ear, which make  
each smile translate to lust, each word to theft.

The demon holds the heart; and lest it break  
even while it hardens, he girds it with his dread  
tail-swallowing, ever-contracting snake.

Clinging in the dank curtains of the bed,  
the incubus suffuses his obscene  
curse on the groom, and holds the bride instead.

In what forgotten cell, unheard, unseen,  
lies suffocating toward death the true queen?

O lost, lost soul! created to be human,  
yet from childhood ever self-atrophied,  
all sympathies unexercised, gone rigid:  
eyes that see not; tongue that has never spoken;  
ears closed to melody; nostrils unshaken;  
the heart, harder for never being broken  
(who now could ever make it breathe and bleed?);  
the ice-locked loins, that should have given, taken,  
refusing man, therefore denying woman;  
every portal sealed from within, frost-frigid,  
ever betrayed by sudden lust, blind greed,  
ever grasping, never giving - Lost, lost!  
The kingdoms of the world at what a cost!

"Now we own all!" the Selfhood cried; and she  
(in what sick hour) at last beheld his face.

She said: "Your All is nothing but disgrace.

"When Life is sin, Death is but decency.

"How mad my years whilst you ensorcelled me!

"But I return your wages: time, space,

"this queendom of your world. Yea, I erase

"us both, and thus revert to reality."

Stiff in her emptied house, at the tea-tray

sits Mrs. Craig, her lovely face gone grey.

Unclenched at last, her hands lie on her knees.

The tea-cup stands there with the tell-tale lees.

Cancel our condemnations. Heap upon her  
not even pity; but for her victory, honor!

Time-Space is one, an unnamed thing out-wheeled  
bifold, as stage for all the things that are.

Gravitation and the magnetic field  
are also one thing, spiralling circular.

Every flower has its especial star;  
strength in secret each from the other draws.

The Ens and the Minute Particular  
curve round, touch, and are one without a pause.

And from a single source, Effect and Cause  
spring, though in sequence seemingly they move.

One is the Universe and one its laws;  
and yet that unity I cannot prove  
till I connect the indifferent sun and moon  
to my close violin's spontaneous tune.

George Spelvin

79

*Oh for a genuine passion to play!*

*Would I not tatter it and split your ears!*

Spelvin's the name. Do you remember me?  
George Spelvin, of the faceless common rout;  
and yet I also serve, for I am the  
unmemorable helper who fills out:

the bored attendant at the heroes' flyting,  
the first pike-thruster in the crucial fighting,  
wine-pourer at the subsequent palaver,  
and always, always, always the cadaver.

Well, it is right to be a convenience  
in the greater design, and I am game -  
all patterns require their many-threaded warps.

But I should like to star, just once!  
as hero, cast under my real name,  
and not forever be the conquered corpse.

*Next Time I Wish You'd Remember My Name.*



## Inconclusive Epilogue





## I

This eve is Hallowe'en, feast of the souls.  
Here they come, pushing and staring, out of the fog  
into the dimmed room: nameless horrors, ghouls,  
crones, idiots, to enjoy Life's epilogue.

Ho for the dance! The witch pursues the devil,  
the lone ghost hugs its emptied skeleton;  
all the old cruelties, fears, all forms of evil  
revive and revel again, fearless of dawn.

Now for the supper!

Instantly they unmask.

Look! they are children gleeful with innocence.  
Popcorn, apples, icecream are what they ask;  
all the terrors were exquisite pretence.

And thus humanity's ancient sins and shames  
dissolve into the children's innocent games.

But this is Hallowe'en of the thaumaturge.  
Music: my skull-drum, your rib-xylophones.  
The show: an X-ray movie of blurred bones  
jigging the Danse Macabre upon the verge.  
Enjoy my party! Laugh heartily, I urge.  
This book is my catharsis (free from groans);  
may you enjoy, too, on your private thrones,  
a good, healthy, Aristotelean purge.

Americans, you are right! For he laughs best  
who laughs both first and last: let it resound,  
thrilling Byss and Abyss, from throat, breast,  
belly, at this Boo from below. Have I clowned?  
then laugh merrily! (Somewhere, blest or unblest,  
my skull is grinning at you underground.)

*who, me?*

Goodbye! And now one thing at last is certain:

I gave the signal long ago myself  
to the stage-hands when to ring down the curtain  
upon this trashy drama of myself.

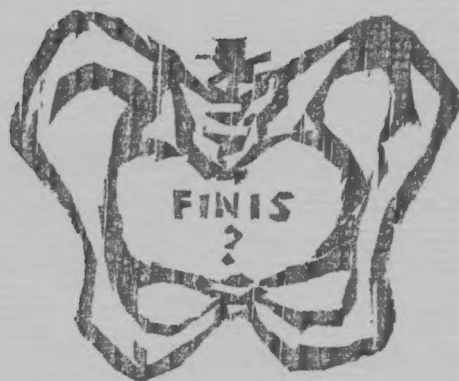
By whom was the long play so badly written,  
so blurred, so inconclusive, but myself?  
Who was it, passion-lashed and conscience-smitten,  
played both the agonists but selfsame myself?

And in those characters, what histrionics,  
stupidities, falsities, I wrote myself!  
And who else were the villains and the comics,  
the dancers, mobs, and orchestra, but myself.

Yes, even the scenery (not too bad): myself.  
And you, the disgusted audience, - myself.

Go, little book! Released at last into  
the sublunary air, follow me not  
here underground, but lift your necrotic thought  
on quick bat-wings filmy with graveyard dew.  
Flit forth at dusk; scud over dell and scarp,  
until you find some Byronic youth, like me  
posed not completely unselfconsciously  
beneath a weeping willow, with a harp.  
Fly straight to him! Flutter about his eyes!  
Fill his uneasy mind with strange surmise!  
And if one of the cords is snapped or sprung,  
light on his harp; lest something go unsung,  
replace the missing note, however bad,  
with your shrill shriek. He will be very glad.

Inscrutable to the Last  
*(or so He thought)*



*(Nonnulla desunt)*

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